



Everybody Loves “Absolutely Anna”

Noted thespian Anna Berger treats Aruba Beach Club guests to nostalgic journey through theater history

Aruba welcomes many visitors annually, who have purchased timesharing and come here year after year to relax and refresh, and when they do, they leave behind their everyday lives, and become equal. Little does the casual observer realize they are sometimes talking to individuals that are famous back in the U.S., as here, they all become “people on vacation.”

Such a person is Anna Berger, who with her husband Bob Malatzky and her daughters Joanna and Susan, has been vacationing annually in Aruba for over twenty years. One may think when they meet her, “Don’t I know this woman from somewhere?” but exactly where, is hard to define, because Anna is one of those expert, chameleon-like actresses that so become the part they play audiences only remember the characters they bring to life.

Anna has spent over fifty years as a successful working actress on stage, screen and television. She is every directors favorite Jewish, Italian, Polish, you-name-it ethnic mama, aunt or grandmother, immortalizing such characters as Aunt May in Woody Allen’s “Crimes and Misdemeanors.” Most recently TV audiences know her as “Cookie” in *The Sopranos*, and she was the first to play one of the most famous Jewish mothers of all, “Golde” in “Tevye and his Daughters” when it was on stage in New York, before being transformed into “Fiddler on the Roof.” Anna is the recipient of a “Lifetime Achievement Award” from her peers of the Coleman and Smith Artistic Company (COLSAC- www.colsac.org.)

Anna was encouraged by her colleagues at The Actors’ Studio to collect her memories of the years during which Broadway, Hollywood and television were established, which she has done in the form of a one-woman monologue titled “Absolutely Anna.” It is an emotional and enlightening journey through time, beginning with the characters that populated the Lower East Side during the 1930’s, and her experiences from The Settlement House. From this rich ethnic mix Anna drew much of her inspiration for the characters she would play later in life. At the age of ten, she had her first brush with “method acting,” and was required to play an Italian mother that sees her son gunned down by the Mafia before her eyes. Noted actress Ruth Hagen taught Anna to draw on her own personal painful experiences, and the young girl rose to the task.

Anna lived through The Depression, World War II, The McCarthy era, and was a witness and participant in many of the milestones that made acting history. Her first boyfriend was Walter Matthau, and she recounts their wartime romance and correspondence. Her first important acting job was touring in “Diamond Lil” with Mae West, with whom she became intimate friends. She talks about her fellow acting student and friend, “Bernie,” later to become famous as Tony Curtis. Anna studied under Erwin Piscator, a name not generally known, but historically considered one of the greatest theater directors, and founder of The Dramatic Workshop. Studying and starving alongside Anna during those years were such luminaries as Rod Steiger, Ben Gazzara, Bea Arthur, Kim Stanley, and some young man that was instructed to help carry the lighting, by the name of Marlon Brando. All these intimate “behind the scenes” memories are presented in a delightful and enthralling monologue, and Anna treated her fellow timeshare owners at the Aruba Beach Club to a performance on Tuesday afternoon, earning her a standing ovation from the appreciative guests and staff. It chronicled the trials and triumphs of a life in the theater, offering a fascinating window into cultural history, each character populating it brought to life by Anna’s wit and skill.

Anna has performed her show “Absolutely Anna” at several venues, often for charity. During her busy life traveling back and forth between the east and west coast she managed to marry Bob “the best husband in the world,” who staunchly supported her in her career, raising their daughters, and maintaining their home while holding an important administrative position in the New York Educational System. She is mother to two loving daughters, who while children performed on stage with her in Tennessee Williams’ “The Rose Tattoo” with Maureen Stapleton. Her older daughter is still a busy working actress under the stage name of “Joanna Sanchez” and Susan enjoys a career as a top hairstylist in New York City. They come to Aruba with their parents for two weeks every summer to relax and enjoy their favorite vacation spot. Anna’s brother Alex, who is a syndicated columnist appearing in 18 newspapers in the Northeast, is also an owner at the ABC with his wife Gloria.

For the end of her show, Anna fantasizes a telephone conversation with Erwin Piscator, who is up in heaven enjoying a chat with other acting greats. She asks him if he can give her any advice, and he

replies, “Absolutely, Anna!-Always leave end your show with a laugh!” which she has done repeatedly in her long career, and continues to do, now with her one-woman show.